

Montana/Dakotas BLM Access Initiative

PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING DOCUMENT:

To provide information on the Montana/Dakotas Access initiative.

ISSUES:

Access to public lands is a high priority for the Montana/Dakotas BLM. The changing ownership of private lands and the subsequent blocking of access to public lands has, at times, created a critical access situation in Montana and the Dakotas. At the same time, there is significant community growth, decreasing access to many private lands and increasing demand for access to public lands.

Over the past few years, our ability to acquire public access to BLM-managed lands has decreased substantially due to the loss of BLM realty positions, a lack of funds to acquire access, and an increasing workload for our staff. We are working to develop a course of action that will emphasize the importance of access and accelerate our ability to create more public access to BLM lands in the three states.

BACKGROUND:

Montana BLM State Director Gene Terland and Associate State Director Howard Lemm have identified access to public lands as a high priority for Montana/Dakotas. In January 2008, they directed the SMT to form a committee to examine access issues and make recommendations. The committee met with various government and non-government organizations and developed recommendations.

To achieve a proactive access program, we must: 1) utilize a variety of methods to acquire public access including land exchanges, fee acquisition, easements, right-of-way negotiations for reciprocal public access, Block Management, etc.; 2) utilize a number of tools such as BLM staff, BLM retirees, partnerships, contracts, volunteers, land trusts, and funding sources such as the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act funds, etc, to secure public access; and 3) have a BLM staff member dedicated to acquiring access to BLM-managed public lands, which we lack currently.

MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE:

The Access Team made the following recommendations:

- 1) One position should be developed and funded from a number of benefiting subactivities. This position, which would report to MT 924, Branch of Land Resources, would work to develop partnerships, assess access opportunities, and focus on the acquisition of public access to land managed by the BLM in Montana/Dakotas. The incumbent would work with state, federal and non-government organizations to develop partnerships and access opportunities. This position will be operational in nature.
- 2) As this position develops and access opportunities are identified and prioritized, the need for additional staff will be determined and proposed.
- 3) The subcommittee also recommends that coordination and consultation with state, federal and non-government entities explore the feasibility of establishing a joint BLM/State Public Access Team.

BUREAU PERSPECTIVE:

Montana/Dakotas BLM believes that it is imperative that we proactively address the issue of public access on BLM lands in Montana/Dakotas.

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